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JFK Death Plot Play Defended

Parody Lampoons the Johnsons and Kennedys

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An off-Broadway play, "MacBird," which implies that President Johnson plotted John F. Kennedy's assassination and casts Sen. Robert Kennedy as a power-hungry avenger, was defended today by its co-producer as "thought provoking."

The play was called "tasteless" by a printer, Jay Rosenblatt, who refused to run off programs for the free verse parody, which lampoons the Johnsons, the Kennedys and Adlai Stevenson.

Miss Julia Curtis, co-producer of the play, commented that, "this is one of the best things about a play, if somebody finds something offensive about it. Too much theater is in good taste—and is terribly dull."

Rosenblatt, who prints "Showcard" in his plant at 586 Ninth Ave., explained his decision was not a business choice, but a highly personal opinion.

"I'm shocked," he said. "Really rocked. They do a parody on the Macbeth theme, where Macbeth is MacBird and MacBird is obviously Lyndon Johnson. It's the worst possible taste. I don't want to be associated with it. I'm ashamed."

"There are limits and somebody's got to say—enough, hold it. They can attack Johnson's policies. I couldn't care less," Rosenblatt insisted. "But to paint the man as a conspirator is crazy, lunacy. It's wrong. Somebody has to say it before the play opens, not afterward when it's already done."

WRITTEN BY STUDENT

"MacBird" first appeared in print last year as a free verse pamphlet of satire, written by Mrs. Barbara Garson when she was a student at the University of California at Berkeley. So far, 20,000 copies have been sold across the nation.

The script depicts President and Mrs. Johnson as MacBird and Lady MacBird, parodies of Shakespeare's Macbeth and Lady Macbeth whose overweening ambition lead them to murder Duncan for his crown.

Although hewing closely to the Shakespearean version, Mrs. Garson has turned "Macbeth's" three witches into an elderly liberal, a beatnik and a Black Muslim who intone — instead of "bubble, bubble" — "Burn, baby, burn."

In the opening scenes, the witches assure MacBird that he need fear no man "with beating heart or human blood." MacBird then arranges the murder of Ken O'Dunc (President Kennedy).

Lady MacBird is portrayed with all the single-minded viciousness of Lady MacBeth. But instead of the futile washing of a bloody. "damned spot," Lady MacBird wails, "Flowers by the roadside, plant these flowers...Let all the land be lined with living blooms."

MacBird finally dies of a heart attack, just as Robert O'Dunc is about to skewer him. Then Robert O'Dunc reveals that his father had replaced his and Ken O'Dunc's hearts with steel and their blood with "antiseptic brine" to fit them for "roles of world authority."

The 25-year-old authoress, Mrs. Garson, and her husband now live in Brooklyn. She is writing a second play, with the help of a $5,000 grant from the Yale School of Drama, which she won as a result of writing "MacBird."

The producers have raised $30,000 from 51 backers to stage the play at the Village Gate, 160 Bleecker St. It opens Feb. 8, said Dorothy Ross, the play's publicist.